

# **Managing Conflict**



**Discipline Courses-I**

**Semester-I**

**Paper : Organization Behaviour**

**Unit-IV**

**Lesson: Managing Conflict**

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**1. Learning Outcomes:**

After you have read this lesson, you should be able to:

- explain the meaning of conflict,
- understand the importance of managing conflict,
- appreciate the fact that conflict can be healthy,
- differentiate between positive and negative conflict,
- understand the effects of conflict,
- outline the process of conflict,
- identify the sources of conflict,
- develop an understanding to deal with conflict in a constructive way to develop healthy, fruitful, cordial and cooperative work environment,
- apply conflict prevention techniques for better personal and professional management.

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## 2. Introduction:

What comes to your mind when you hear the term conflict? Is it a disagreement, difference in opinions, dispute or quarrel? Generally, by conflict, we refer to a situation where two people talk, think, interpret and respond to a given situation differently and they do not agree with each other which leads to misunderstandings or differences. But then, the questions that concern us are:

- Is it bad?
- Is it always bad?
- Should it be avoided?
- Can it be prevented?
- Can it be managed?

We have often heard our parents, teachers, friends and the social system advocating the fact that conflicts can't be avoided, they are bound to happen and that they are an intrinsic part of human nature. Yet we find it difficult to deal with conflicts. We are never comfortable about this facet of human behaviour. We even try to avoid it at any cost, although we know what the fact is: 'It is Inevitable'. Some of us try to find out the root cause of a conflict and then confront it. But it still has an emotional impact on the concerned parties.

Management of conflict is one skill that everyone aspires to acquire. Command on this tough skill is very rewarding. But then like certain other skills, this one also comes with experience and has to be learned. Thus the point of discussion in this lesson is the meaning of conflict and the importance of managing conflict. It also describes possible sources of conflict, strategies to deal with it and the methods that can be followed to prevent it. It specifies certain exercises to help you develop skills for conflict management.

Figure 1: Conflict



## 3. Concept of Conflict:

"Conflict is any situation in which there are incompatible goals, cognitions, or emotions within or between individuals or groups that lead to opposition or

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antagonistic interaction. It is the struggle between incompatible and opposing needs, wishes, ideas, interests or people.”

-De Janasz, Dowd, and Schneider

“Conflict occurs between people in all kinds of human relationships and in all social settings. Because of the wide range of potential differences among people, the absence of conflict usually signals the absence of meaningful interaction. Conflict by itself is neither good nor bad. However, the manner in which conflict is handled determines whether it is constructive or destructive.”

-Deutsch & Coleman

“Conflict is defined as an incompatibility of goals or values between two or more parties in a relationship, combined with attempts to control each other and antagonistic feelings toward each other.”

-Fisher

“Conflict has the potential for either a great deal of destruction or much creativity and positive social change.”

-Kriesberg

From the above definitions, we can deduce that conflict occurs when there are differences in goals, thoughts or emotions. These differences can take place within a person himself and between two individuals or two or more groups. This results into opposition or a chaos. It can be a situation where groups or individuals have goals that are not compatible, thought processes and emotions may be different which further give way to opposition and unfriendly communication. It can be said that it is a fight between antagonistic and clashing needs, wants, desires, ideas, pursuits, interests, or parties. It is a kind of interaction between people or groups who have difference in approach, attitude, goals, beliefs, values or apprehension of problems. When we start getting a feeling that the other individual is snooping with our capacity to fulfil an objective, then we may say that we are in conflict. It gains momentum when we feel that the other person wants to take an action different from ours or he has a different idea to chase. Conflicts include individual as well as group discords, disagreements, arguments, misunderstandings, or even physical fights. We say that conflict is inevitable because human beings and their behaviour are unique physically as well as emotionally.

In organisations, conflict is a verifiable truth, a reality. It is advisable and important to deal with conflict in a constructive manner. It should encourage creativity and bring in desirable change. Managers should not be intimidated by conflict. They must face it head on in an intelligent manner. They can be effectively trained to tackle situations of conflict. In turn, they can even train the employees to handle the same. They must acknowledge the fact that they can't run away from conflicts and that they have to face them, manage them with the help of productive means. Just like selective control in management, managers need to carefully choose conflicts that require their immediate attention and confront them. It is even said that at times the best way to deal with conflict is to be non-vocal i.e. remain silent.

Sometimes, managers make mistakes that result into unhealthy and needless conflict. It is imperative to let go of the age old notion that conflict means that the performance of the individual involved in it is ineffective. A good manager is one who recognises this fact and tries to manage and resolve conflict in a manner that the

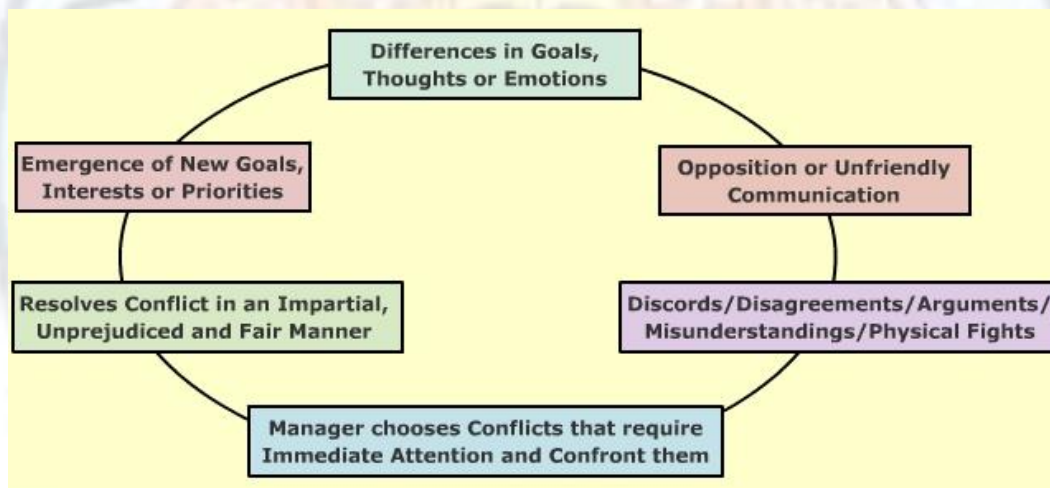


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end result of conflict is impartial, unprejudiced and genuine for the parties concerned.

As shown in the figure below, conflict occurs when there are perceived differences in goals, thoughts or emotions of people in the organization. As a result some opposition starts being visible or there is some unfriendly communication between the parties in conflict. If conflict is not recognized and dealt with at this level, there are increased discords, disagreements, arguments, misunderstandings, or even physical fights between the parties. It is very difficult for the manager to identify presence of conflicting terms among employees at an early stage. It is the discords or disagreements, or arguments or vocal abuse that makes conflict apparent to the manager and the manager chooses the conflicts that must be addressed on a priority basis. Such conflicts that require immediate attention are confronted and an attempt is made to resolve conflict in an impartial, unprejudiced and fair manner. Such an action on the part of the manager leads to creation of new goals, interests or priorities on the basis of the reason of conflict. However, the process of conflict does not end here, and it goes on in a vicious circle. The new goals, interests or priorities so developed may give rise to newer differences in goals, thoughts or emotions; initiating new reasons for conflict.

Figure 2: Process of Conflict



### Value Addition 1: An Opening Case

#### Inappropriate Conflict Management

A manager working with the Central Government comes across a conflicting situation which emerged when a new staff member from a different department was added to his team.

Ramesh, the new member, was known to be an un-cooperative person. Many people have faced the problems with him in the past. He used to leave early from work and was also known for doing his personal work during the office time. Still, the manager was optimistic that his team composed of very hard-working, sincere, honest and cooperative people might be able to bring about a favourable change in his attitude. He hoped that the team would motivate him and Ramesh will eventually start liking his work. But things didn't go as planned. They got even worse.

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The bigger problem was that the HR department was not ready to believe that there could be some serious issues between Ramesh and the team. Even Ramesh seemed to be having some personal issues that became visible after some time. He used to dress up shabbily and it always seemed that he was sleeping out of doors. Things were getting worse with every passing day.

The senior manager asked the manager to tell Ramesh that he could not come to office in such a messy condition. The manager did try talking to Ramesh for the sake of everyone. What happened next was very surprising. Ramesh simply walked away and said that he was never coming back to work. He threatened everyone with harassment. After a period of 6 months, he resigned from his job. The HR Department was afraid that he may sue them. Moreover, no one from the line management supported the manager, especially the senior manager.

1. Do you think this conflict could be solved?
2. What impact did it have on the people involved?
3. How is a line manager expected to react here?

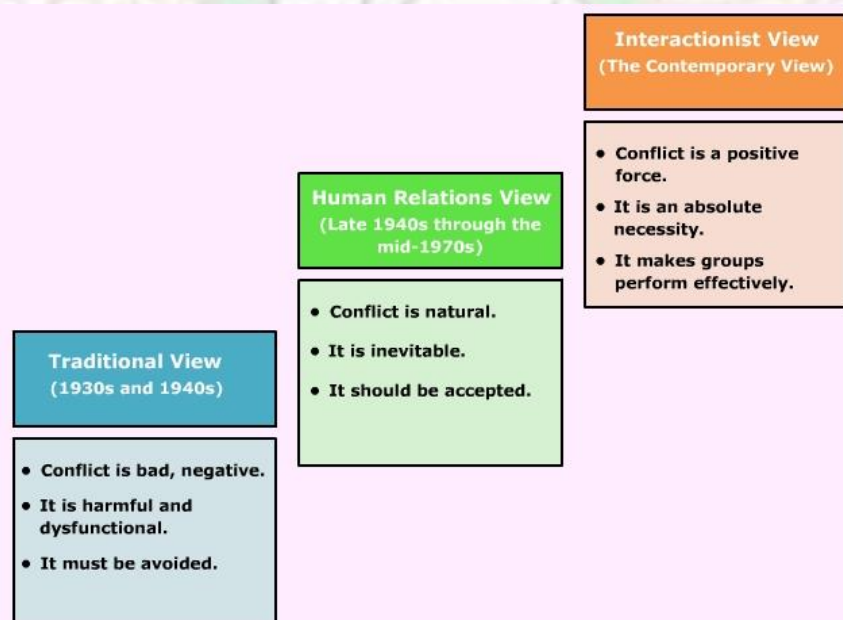
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[http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/humrs/staffinfo/organisationaldevelopment/leadership/das\\_hboard/Managing%20Conflict%20at%20Work%20-%20a%20guide%20for%20line%20managers.pdf](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/humrs/staffinfo/organisationaldevelopment/leadership/das_hboard/Managing%20Conflict%20at%20Work%20-%20a%20guide%20for%20line%20managers.pdf)

### 3.1: Transitions in Conflict Thought

Over the last century, society's perspective about conflict and its management has progressed considerably. These viewpoints are discussed and summated as follows:

Figure 3: Transitions in Conflict



1. **Traditional View**—It prevailed in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was postulated that conflict is necessarily bad and that it should be prevented at

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any cost. This perspective regarded conflict to be the outcome of dysfunctional, defective behaviour of managers and suggested that it must be curbed right at the point of its origin. For example, if the dysfunctional manager is thrown out of the job, the conflict would come to an end.

2. **Human Relations View**—It was the central and most important outlook for over 30 years, from 1940 to 1970. Unlike the traditional view, this view assumed conflict to be natural and unavoidable. It was considered to be a part of human existence. It was approved and acknowledged as part and parcel of group relationships and interactions. Conflict was always there, sometimes constructive and sometimes destructive.
3. **Interactionist View**—This is the contemporary perspective. Like the human relations view, it believes that conflict can't be avoided. It further suggests that just the right amount of tension and conflict keeps the group stimulated, motivated and creative. Conflict must therefore be considered as a positive pressure that is instrumental in bringing about changes in groups, organisations and relationships. The only challenge here is to be able to identify productive ways of managing conflict. For example, in case of variations and differences among group members, directing them towards healthy discussion and change.

### 3.2: Importance of Managing Conflict

In an organisation's life, conflict is normal. Even in families, communities and relationships there are conflicts due to differences in actions, values, ideas, attitudes, perception, etc. Conflict is something that is already there. What we need is to learn is, how to react, to manage conflict.

"If you are distressed by anything external, the pain is not due to the thing itself, but to your own estimate of it; and this you have the power to revoke at any moment."

-Marcus Aurelius

The above statement clearly reveals that while we may not have control over the situation or environment, we surely have control over our own reaction to it. Thereby, conflicting situations may be converted into destructive or creative phenomenon depending upon how we manage them.

Conflicts may be positive as well as negative. The results of conflicts are directly related to the manner in which they are managed.

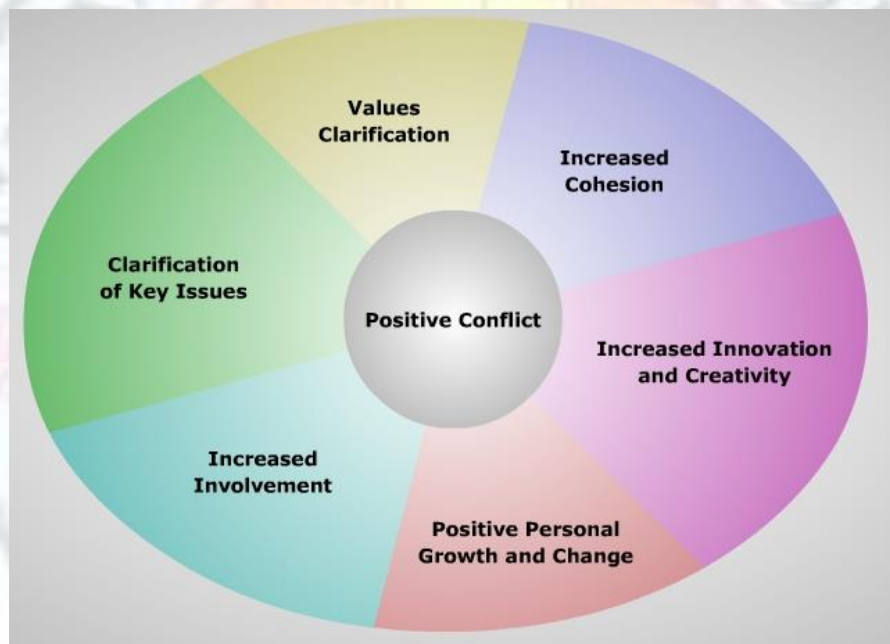
**Positive conflict** is desirable, as it maximises the positive effects of conflict while reducing its harmful effects. It strengthens an organization's or person's primary objectives. It is functional as it may result into providing creative solutions to long standing issues in the following ways:

1. **Increased Involvement**—Positive conflict gives employees a chance to understand people and circumstances, frame goals by having a stake in ideas, getting a platform to voice viewpoints and have increased involvement.
2. **Increased Cohesion**— When group members learn to resolve their differences, they develop strong bonds with each other. They realise that if they can overcome differences, they can enjoy a fruitful, mutually beneficial relationship as well.

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3. Increased Innovation and Creativity—People in groups should be motivated to voice their ideas and share the same with other members. This leads to improved relations, innovative and creative solutions. It gives birth to synergy rather than chaos.
4. Positive Personal Growth and Change— Conflicts are best resolved when people come out with their understanding of others, their views on others, express them openly. In the process they grow, come to know about their own and each other's strengths and weaknesses.
5. Clarification of Key Issues—When members are given a chance to discuss, they reach the root cause of conflict, the differences start to disappear. They work cohesively to sort out other issues as well. Their energy gets re-directed to the origin of conflict to resolve the issues for ever.
6. Values Clarification—When members discuss what they believe in and what they stand for individually, they also learn when to mitigate personal goals and interests to the larger interests of the organisation/ group.

Figure 4: Implications of Positive Conflict



**Negative conflict** is dysfunctional as opposed to positive conflict. It obstructs an organisation and its people's performance. This in turn affects their ability to achieve individual or organisational goals. Conflict may even lead to stress. Anxiety is another product of conflict. It also affects people's ability to take action. People lose their purpose and in some case their esteem. Negative Conflict leads to the following implications:

1. Unresolved Anger—As a result of the unresolved conflict, the individuals feel that their valid concerns have not been dealt with properly or that their goals could not be achieved, they become angry and hostile. They start boycotting interactions, and feel psychologically low.
2. Personality Clashes—People fail to understand their differences and causes of the differences. They do not get any clue as to how should they work collectively. They remain glued to their own personal interests. They do not get any team spirit.



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3. Low Self-esteem or Self-confidence—Sometimes as an outcome of conflict, members start losing their self-worth. This is often viewed as a result of impulsive actions taken in times of conflict.
4. Ambiguous views about Responsibility for Work—Employees have different kinds of expectations from each other, even if these are defined very differently. And if these are not defined clearly there is bound to be clash, chaos and overlapping. The understanding with regard to each other's roles goes differently. It leads to ambiguity.
5. Problems of Efficiency—People here conclude that they can't work with each other leading to redundancies and inefficient use of organisational resources.
6. Unfinished Business—When people continue to have doubts about an issue or have unfulfilled concerns, it acts as a hindrance and stops them from moving ahead.

The implications of Positive & Negative Conflict are summarised in the diagram below.

Figure 5: Implications of Negative Conflict



It is the responsibility of managers to manage and resolve conflicts that arise within the organisations. They also need to make others realise the importance of effective management of conflict. It requires development of a favourable and supportive environment at work that fosters constructive conflict. Processes, training programs and tools must be developed that help people in resolving their differences. It calls for a collective effort and a promise to put an end to or at least reduce the cases of dysfunctional conflict.

Conflicts can be encountered and resolved successfully. This can be done by keeping in mind few key points.

- Conflict is normal and can't be avoided.
- One should not behave in a hysterical manner in situations of conflict.

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- One should always be ready with an action plan to deal with both predictable and unpredictable conflict.
- One should be patient and tolerant for dealing with the conflicts.

## Value Addition 2: Activity

### Careful Listening Game

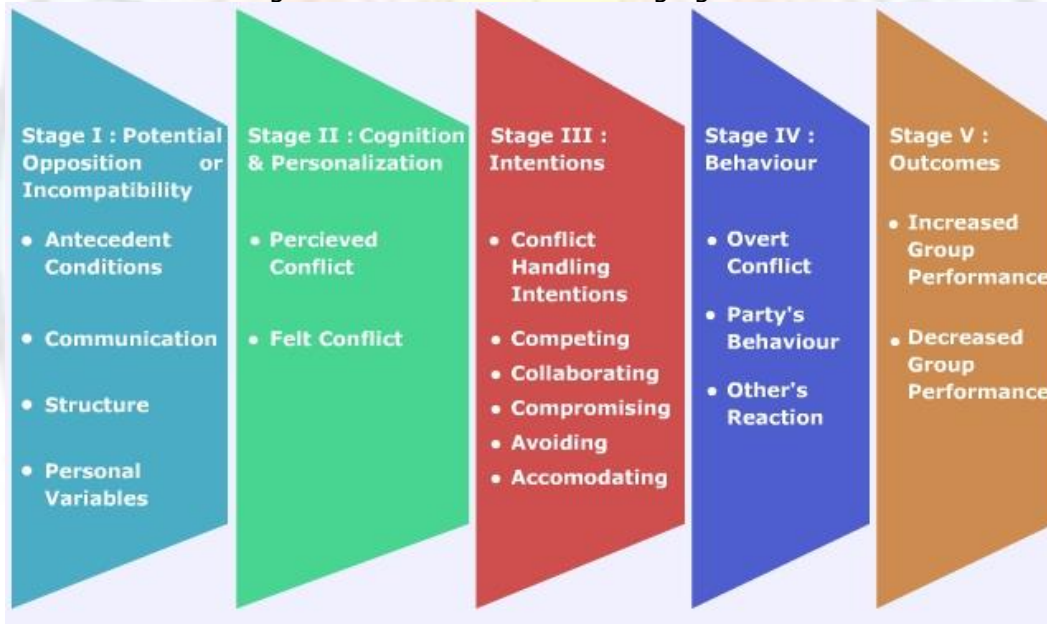
This is a game to know what effective listening is and how it can be done. Choose a partner for yourself. Think of a task that you both need to perform jointly. Ask your partner to develop two separate plans of action for the same and narrate them to you. Listen to Plan A carefully and pay least attention to Plan B. Now communicate with him and see for yourself the difference in the plan you paid attention to and the one you did not listen to.

In which of the plans is there a greater likelihood for conflict to occur?

## 4. Process of Managing Conflict

The five stages in the conflict management process are shown in the diagram below:

Figure 6: The Process of Managing Conflict



### 4.1 Stage I: Potential Opposition or Incompatibility

This stage states that the presence of certain conditions gives birth to conflict. Not all conditions lead to conflict, but one of these pre-requisites is required for conflict to come to surface. For conflict to come to surface, the preconditions may be put under the following three categories.

- Communication
- Structure
- Personal Variables

These conditions are considered as causes or even as sources of conflict.

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**Communication:** Communication though is good for resolving conflicts it may give rise to conflicts too. This can turn out to be an effective source of conflict. It does manifest conflicting forces that come from linguistic difficulties, misconceptions, misunderstandings and noise that exists in the channels of communication.

Barriers to communication such as differing word connotations, use of technical terms, exchange of insufficient information and noise in the channels of communication are potential forces of conflict. Too much and too less communication both increase the risk of conflict. Up to a certain point, an increase in communication level is useful, but when there is over-communication, it increases the potential for conflict.

### **Value Addition 3: Think**

#### **Communication as a source of Conflict**

Meera had worked in logistics management at a Bangalore based organization for 4 years. She was very fond of her work and enjoyed it a lot. Working there was like fun for her largely because of her boss, Mayank. He was a great boss to work with. 6 months back, he got promoted, and Aditya became Meera's new boss. She started disliking her work and it become frustrating to her. Her performance is affected too. She and Mayank had the same wavelength. But it was not like that with Aditya. Meera feels that she does everything as instructed by Aditya but he seems to have 'never satisfied' attitude. She also adds that he says something but means something else and it has been like that since he joined. Not a day goes by when he doesn't scream at her.

1. What do you think makes Meera dislike the same work that she enjoyed so much before?
2. How does communication become a source of conflict in the above case?

**Structure:** Some conflicts are structural in nature. When conflict arises out of variables such as degree of specialization in the tasks assigned to group members, size of the group, leadership styles, member-goal compatibility, jurisdictional clarity and degree of dependence between groups and the reward systems; it is said to be structural in nature.

Research suggests that larger the size of the group and the more specialized they are in their activities, greater will be the possibility of conflict. Moreover, there is an inverse relationship between tenure and conflict. When employee turnover is high and when there are young group members, the likelihood of conflict is the greatest. With lesser clarity in defining the responsibility for actions, the chances of conflict rise. When there is ambiguity over control and use of resources and territory, conflicts emerge. Another important source of conflict is differences in goals to be achieved. Reward systems also lead to conflict when a group member gains at the cost of another member. Also, when two groups are dependent on each other and one gains at the expense of the other, conflict can be felt.

### **Value Addition 4: Think**

#### **Structure as a source of Conflict**

Kabir and Akshay both work in the same automobile company. Akshay is a salesperson while Kabir is the credit manager. Both of them have known each other for years and have a lot in common. They live in the same locality; their children go to the same school. They also happen to be good friends. Had Akshay and Kabir been in different jobs they still would have been best friends, just like their kids.



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But another truth is that they are always in conflict with each other. Akshay's job is to sell cars and he is very good at his job. Most of his sales are made on credit. Since Kabir's job is to ensure that the company does not incur credit losses, he turns down most of the credit applications of Akshay's customers. Akshay and Kabir are constantly in conflict even when they have nothing personal against each other.

1. What brings Kabir and Akshay in conflict at work despite their deep friendship?
2. If the customers are made to get their credit verification done prior to approaching the salesperson, what difference will it make?
3. In what way such conflicts can be handled constructively?

Discuss with your peers.

**Personal Variables:** Many a times we find ourselves in contact with people for whom we develop an immediate disliking. We disagree with almost every opinion and suggestion they have or make. Small, petty, insignificant things such as - the voice of people, the way people smile, walk, talk, behave and their overall personality irritate us. All of us have surely met such people in our lives at some point of time. Just imagine how you would feel if you are asked to work with them? You would definitely find yourself to be in an awkward position. Such a situation increases the chances of conflict.

Yet another source of conflict includes personal variables such as values, personality and emotions. Personality characteristics such as being too authoritarian and dogmatic often lead to conflicting situations. Emotions also give rise to conflict. Suppose you had a hectic morning, you are irritated because of that and you carry that irritation and anger with you to work. To add on to the frustration, you reach office late because of traffic. You have an important meeting at work. You are already filled with anger. You will surely carry it with you inside the meeting, it will annoy your colleagues also and the environment will be filled with tension.

### Value Addition 5: Think

#### Personal Variables as a source of Conflict

Rajat and Vijaya both work in the same organization. Both occupy dignified senior positions of management. While Rajat looks and behaves very professionally, Vijaya is very unprofessional and casual by nature. Rajat developed an immediate disliking for Vijaya soon after meeting her. Her giggling in meetings, wearing loud and striking colours to workplace, wearing too much of make-up and accessories, being loud in meetings annoys him severely.

1. What do you think is the source of conflict between Rajat and Vijaya?
2. When there has never been any one-on-one argument between the two, is Rajat's disliking for Vijaya justified?

Discuss with your peers.

## 4.2 Stage II: Cognition and Personalization

This second stage does not come into force unless and until the conditions stated in the first stage affect a party negatively. The chances of incompatibility and opposition immediately come into action when a person is negatively affected about something that he cares for.



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As stated in our discussion earlier, for conflict to happen there has to be a perception which may differ from other people's perception. Only then will conflict take place. Hence, the antecedent conditions must be felt by one or more people. Moreover, it is a point worth noting that if a conflict is a perceived one, it does not imply that it is actually prevalent. For e.g. X and Y may disagree with each other. Still they may not be tensed about it. It may not cause any anxiety. It may not even be able to affect their affection for each other. It is only when the parties become emotionally involved and reach the felt conflict level that they begin to experience hostility, tension, anxiety and frustration.

Certain points need to be kept in mind here. Conflicting issues are defined only at the second stage. The individuals or groups here realize and define their reasons of conflict. Also, perceptions are shaped by emotions. For e.g. if one is in negative state of emotions, he may overcomplicate even the simplest and harmless issues, lose trust in others and misinterpret the behavior of others. On the other hand, when one is in a positive state of emotions, he tends to behave in a completely different manner. People who are in a positive state of mind tend to find innovative solutions to problems and they also are able to find a potential relationship even in the midst of a problem.

## 4.3 Stage III: Intentions

Once conflict has emerged out of communication, structure and personal variables; and the concerned individual has taken cognizance of the same, he tries to interpret the intentions of the other party. Depending upon his willingness to be assertive and co-operative, he may after interpreting the other's intentions, decide for one of the following behavior/ reactions:

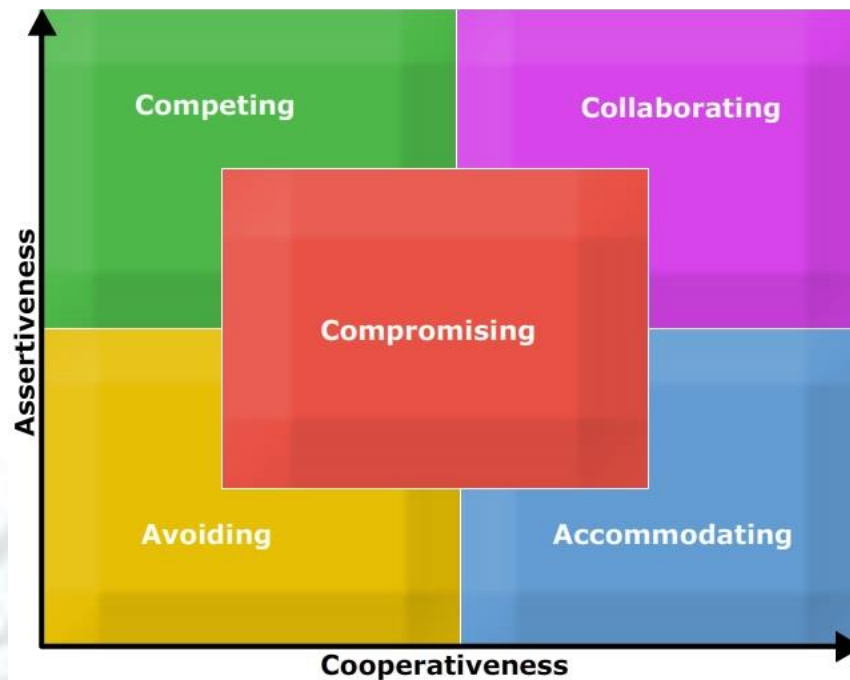
- To compete,
- To collaborate,
- To avoid,
- To accommodate, and
- To compromise,

Intentions obtrude people's emotions and perceptions and also their apparent behavior. These intentions are outcomes or decisions to behave in a certain manner. 'Intentions' are treated as a separate stage since it is really important to infer the other person's intentions also. An understanding of the other person's intentions is necessary since it helps to know how one is supposed to respond to the other's behaviour. Many a times conflicts occur unnecessarily because one person could not correctly understand the other person's intentions and he over-reacted by misinterpreting the other party. This escalates conflict. Moreover, one can not accurately define intentions on the basis on behaviour since there is great amount of slippage between the two.

The figure below exhibits a researcher's attempt to determine and establish the primary conflict-handling intentions.

Figure 7: Dimensions of Conflict-Handling Intentions

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The researcher has identified 5 conflict management intentions on the basis of 2 dimensions namely: cooperativeness and assertiveness. Cooperativeness is the extent to which one party is willing to satiate concerns of the other party. Assertiveness, on the other hand, is the extent to which an individual is concerned about satisfying his own interests. So, the 5 dimensions of conflict-handling intentions are:

- Competing - Assertive and uncooperative,
- Collaborating - Assertive and cooperative,
- Avoiding - Unassertive and uncooperative,
- Accommodating - Unassertive and cooperative,
- Compromising - Midway on assertiveness and cooperativeness.

**Competing:** When a person is indifferent about the interests and needs of the conflicting party and seeks to satisfy his interests only, he is said to be competing. In simplistic terms, when one wins a game of chance and the other candidate loses, it is called competing.

**Collaborating:** When the conflicting parties make an effort to completely fulfill the interests of each other, there is harmony and quest for finding a mutually beneficial conclusion. In collaboration, they do not try to accommodate different viewpoints; rather they clarify their differences to find out a meaningful solution. Their aim is to find a win-win solution that allows both the parties to achieve their individual goals completely. This is called collaboration.

**Avoiding:** When a person who is less assertive realizes that there is a conflict, he starts withdrawing himself from it or begins to suppress it. For e.g. one tries to ignore a conflicting situation or the person with whom one does not agree. This is called avoiding.

**Accommodating:** When an individual who is less assertive but more cooperative tries to pacify the other party, he/she willingly tries to give more importance to his

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opponent's interests. It means that he is trying to maintain the relationship by sacrificing his own interests. This is referred to as accommodating. Here, one party supports the other party's opinion even though the former has reservations about it.

**Compromising:** When both the parties seek to forgo something, sharing happens and the outcome is a compromised result. Here, no one is a total winner or loser. Both the parties here agree to accept incomplete satisfaction of their respective interests by giving up something.

Intentions are not always permanent. In the process of conflict, they may undergo change because of re-consideration. It may also happen as a result of emotional response to the other party's behaviour.

## 4.4 Stage IV: Behaviour

Until this stage, the conflict remains in the mind. Here, it gets manifested in the behavior. The conflict becomes completely evident in this stage. The conflicting party's reactions, statements and actions come at a surface here. The conflicting behaviour here becomes an apparent effort to administer the intentions of both the parties. Such behaviours have a provocation quality and it is different from intentions.

This stage is a dynamic interaction process. This can be illustrated with the help of an example. 'A' demands something from 'B' who starts arguing with 'A'. 'A' in turn threatens 'B' and it continues like this. One can visualize conduct of conflict behaviour with the help of diagram below.

Figure 8: Conflict Intensity Continuum



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Every kind of conflict prevails at some point along this pyramid. The lower end of the pyramid is indicative of conflicts that are suggestive, indistinct, implied and demonstrate controlled tension. A very basic and simple example is of a student asking question about a point that the teacher has just explained.

The intensity of conflict amplifies as we move upward along the pyramid. As we approach the highest point, the conflict becomes highly damaging. Wars, riots and strikes distinctly fall in this higher range. One can assume that the conflicts that fall in the lower range are functional and can be used to increase productivity, improve understanding, better the relations, and enhance creativity and innovation among other things. On the other extreme, the conflicts that are near the higher range are extremely dysfunctional.

<b>Value Addition 6: Activity</b>
<b>Careful Listening Game</b>
This is a game to know what effective listening is and how it can be done. Choose a partner for yourself. Think of a task that you both need to perform jointly. Ask your partner to develop two separate plans of action for the same and narrate them to you. Listen to Plan A carefully and pay least attention to Plan B. Now communicate with him and see for yourself the difference in the plan you paid attention to and the one you did not listen to. In which of the plans is there a greater likelihood for conflict to occur?

If the conflict is escalating and is dysfunctional, what should the aggrieved parties do to subjugate and weaken it? One can also ask, what the conflicting parties should do to amplify the conflict if it is too low. This will direct us towards techniques of managing conflict. The diagrams below enlist the prominent stimulation and resolution techniques that aid managers in controlling the levels of conflict. Many of these techniques have already been discussed earlier as conflict handling intentions. Under optimal circumstances, an individual's intentions should decode into comparable behaviour.

<b>Value Addition 7: Activity</b>
<b>'I' Statements</b>
Think of issues that you have with others and where you were not able to express your feelings. The others did not hear you. Individually, the participants have to carefully portray their emotions and try not to blame others in this process. <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What was the main reason for conflict to take place in the above case?</li><li>2. How was conflict avoided here?</li></ol> Discuss with your peers.

Figure 9: Conflict-Resolution Techniques



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<b>Problem Solving</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It involves open discussion.</li><li>• The conflicting parties meet face-to-face.</li><li>• They identify the problem together and try to resolve it.</li></ul>	<b>Superordinate Goals</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A common and shared goal is created here.</li><li>• This goal can't be achieved unless the conflicting parties cooperate.</li></ul>	<b>Expansion of Resources</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This method is used when conflict is due to scarcity of a resource.</li><li>• The scarce resource is expanded.</li><li>• It creates a win-win situation.</li></ul>
<b>Aviodance</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The conflict is suppressed.</li><li>• The conflicting parties may even try to withdraw themselves from the conflict.</li></ul>	<b>Smoothing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The conflicting parties try to play down their differences.</li><li>• They emphasize on common interests.</li></ul>	<b>Compromise</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Every conflicting party gives up something that is of value to them.</li></ul>
<b>Authoritative Command</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Formal authority is used by the management.</li><li>• It is done to resolve the conflict.</li><li>• The desires of the management are then communicated to the involved parties.</li></ul>	<b>Altering the Human Variable</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Behavioural change techniques are used here.</li><li>• Human relations training may be imparted.</li><li>• Conflict causing attitudes and behaviours are changed.</li></ul>	<b>Altering the Structural Variable</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Formal organizational structure is changed.</li><li>• Interaction patterns of the conflicting parties are changed.</li><li>• This is done through job design, transfers etc.</li></ul>

Figure 10: Conflict-Stimulation Techniques

# Conflict Stimulation Techniques

<p><b>Communication</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This technique uses ambiguous messages.</li> <li>• Threatening messages are also used.</li> <li>• It is done to increase conflict levels.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Bringing in outsiders</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees are added to the group.</li> <li>• These employees are different from the present members.</li> <li>• The difference is in terms of background, values, attitudes or managerial styles.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Restructuring the organization</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The work groups are realigned.</li> <li>• Rules &amp; regulations are altered.</li> <li>• Interdependence is increased.</li> <li>• Silimar other changes are made to disturb the status quo.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Appointing a devil's advocate</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A critic is appointed.</li> <li>• Purposely he argues with the group.</li> <li>• The argument is about the positions held by the group.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Value Addition 8: Activity</b></p>
<p><b>Dog and the Bone</b></p> <p>Make groups of 6 students each. Every participant has to think of a conflict at workplace that involves him and is still unresolved. Then write down this conflict on a piece on paper which is in the form of a bone. The group has to put paper bones in a bowl. Participants then have to pick up a random bone and suggest ways of resolving it.</p>

## 4.5 Stage V: Outcomes

The action-reaction reciprocation between the conflicting parties has certain implications. These consequences may be functional and improve the group's performance, or may be dysfunctional and bring down the performance of the group.

**Functional Outcomes:** It is difficult to imagine how aggression can be useful. There are numerous instances and examples that help us in understanding that low and moderate levels of conflict can be used to improve and aggravate group performance. Let us consider some examples before moving towards research evidence. The conflict related to task and performance is considered here. The ones related to relationships are excluded.

Functional conflict has implications in the form of improved decisions, innovation and creativity among individuals and groups, increase in curiosity and interest in the group. Problems are aired leading to release of tension, an environment of introspection is created and change is fostered. Conflict confronts the present state

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of affairs and instills development of new ideas. It advocates reevaluation of group goals and activities. In this process the group starts reciprocating to change.

Taking the example of General Motors, let us look at the problems faced by the General Managers due to lack of functional conflict. 'Yes' people were hired by the management and given promotions. They never questioned the policies of the company. The management accepted the workers' demands for generous health care and personal benefits. This resulted in increased labour costs, higher than those of their competitors. The problem forced the automaker to cut down jobs, shut down assembly plants to bring down costs.

Conflict aversion was also done at Yahoo! Former CEO Tim Koogle was averse to conflict. The managers felt so satisfied that they did not even question the status quo. When Yahoo! started operating, it was much more successful than Google, but conflict aversion pulled it so low that it may never catch up with Google again.

Research findings have confirmed that conflict is functional and that it has a positive impact on productivity. Research also indicates that cultural diversity in groups and organizations boosts creativity, improves decisions making and promotes change by increasing member flexibility.

**Dysfunctional Outcomes:** The damaging outcomes of conflict and their impact on the performance of a group or an organization are known to all. If protest, discontentment, opposition and restlessness is uncontrolled, it leads to bitterness. This bitterness mitigates all cordial relations and ties. It may reach such a level that it ultimately breaks the group. Effectiveness of the groups, cohesiveness, and communication all start retarding. Survival of the group becomes a big challenge.

The death of organizations due to dysfunctional conflict is not something new. Shea and Gould, a law firm in New York was forced to shut down because 80% of its partners could not get along well with each other. A legal consultant who knew the organization said, "This was a firm that had the differences with regard to basic principles and attitudes among the partners that were irreconcilable." The same consultant attended the last meeting of Shea and Gould and said, "You don't have an economic problem. You have a personality problem. You hate each other!"

**Creating Functional Conflict:** What can managers do to enhance functional conflict in their organizations if they agree with the interactionist view of conflict? According to a consultant, "A high proportion of people who get to the top are conflict avoiders. They don't like hearing negatives; they don't like saying or thinking negative things. They frequently make it up the ladder in part because they don't irritate people on the way up." Another consultant says that out of every 10 people in the United States business, 7 conceal their opinions when they do not match with those of their bosses and let them make mistakes even though they know better.

Dissent must be readily accepted and supported. Organizations must not feel threatened by them. Instead they must encourage employees to speak freely, voice their fears and oppositions, question the organizational systems and promote fresh ideas.

- Hewlett-Packard – people who have dissents are rewarded.
- Herman Miller Inc. – this is a manufacturer of office furniture. It has a formal system which allows employees to examine and criticize their bosses.
- IBM supports dissension.

One thing that is common in organizations that have been successful in creating functional conflict is that they support and encourage dissent and punish conflict

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avoiders. The challenge here is that how should the managers react when they get to hear things that they do not want to hear. They can't show their expectations collapsing or blood boiling. They need to know that they have to accept the bad news without crouching. They must not react by rolling their eyes upward, gritting their teeth, abusing people or passing sarcastic comments. Instead they should remain calm and composed and ask questions like: "Can you tell me more about what happened?"; "What do you think we ought to do?"; "Thank you for bringing this to my attention", etc.

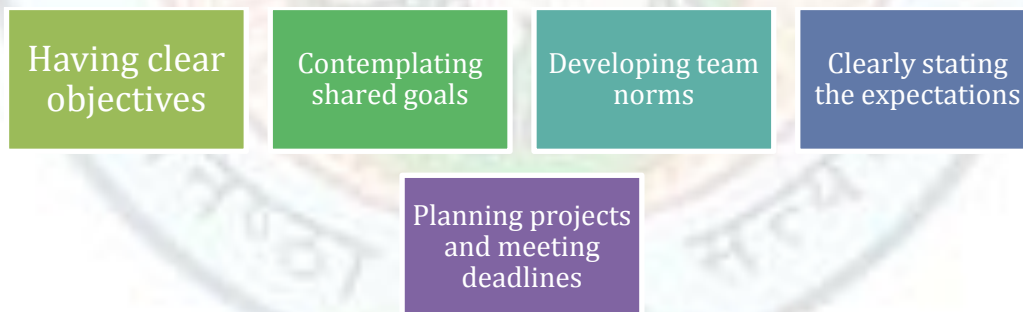
<b>Value Addition 9: Self-Assessment Exercise</b>
<b>Conflict-Handling</b>
Click on the link give below in the 'source' and find a set of questions to be answered on a scale of 5 in order to know and assess your conflict management skills.
Source: <a href="http://www.apollolibrary.com/Library/ltt/download/ConflictSourcesSolutions.pdf">http://www.apollolibrary.com/Library/ltt/download/ConflictSourcesSolutions.pdf</a>

### 5. Techniques of Preventing Conflict

It has been said again and again that conflict is healthy, but it would still be wise to wipe off any traces of conflict even before they begin. Careful management of conflict can help managers enjoy the advantages of conflict beyond costs. Some techniques that can be used to deflect conflict are shown in the diagram below.

**Team building:** Managers should train employees to develop team-building skills and cultivate team spirit. These skills alleviate the level of conflict that prevails in team setting. Some of the skills are shown the diagram below:

Figure 11: Team-Building Skills



The objectives must always be clearly stated for everyone to understand without ambiguity. All the employees must pursue and move towards accomplishment of one common goal which is shared by all. Departmental or Task teams should discuss and adopt rules or norms for achieving the objectives. The expectations of the group must be stated clearly so that the members of a group know what they have to do. Group members must prepare action plans and try to work as per the schedule.

**Diversity training:** Organizations provide this kind of training since people today vary with respect to their background, culture, values, goals, education, ideas, economic status etc. Here employees are coached to realise the importance of these



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differences and managing them in an effective way. Training must be given to employees so that one can understand human behaviour in a better way to avoid conflict. They must be made aware of the kind of differences that may appear between individuals and the manner in which they have to be dealt with. The employees should be taught how they can maximise their strengths to bring out their best performance for the benefit of the organisation. They should know how they have to behave within their group and with members of other groups as well. The feeling and practice of discrimination should never be encouraged.

**Open communication:** Companies nowadays have become informal and personal in terms of communicating with employees. They exchange information. Companies that have an open system of communication make use of the following tools as in the diagram below:

Figure 12: Tools of Open Communication



When employees meet each other at regular staff meetings, they tend to discuss their problems, get to know each other; the chances of conflict fall. This is because communication and interaction is the best way to avoid confusion, disagreement and differences. Internal newsletter is another medium by which employees become aware of each other and also learn what they are expected to do. Feedback regarding an individual helps him in knowing his short-comings and also what others think of him. Accordingly, he may make necessary adjustments to avoid conflicts. Many organisations conduct surveys with respect to the kind of attitudes that employees are expected to portray and what they actually portray to mitigate the differences, if any.

**Conflict management training:** Organisations have come up with training programs to coach employees on managing conflict effectively. These programs help employees to constructively deal with conflict, respect other's viewpoints, perceptions and feelings, listen carefully, communicate confidently, solve problems cooperatively, encourage conflict constructively, use communication skills to handle conflict, predict and behave accordingly and deal with problems in their inception stage itself.

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**Allocation of Resources:** Organizations need to obtain and allocate resources within departments in new and better ways that assure reduction of negative conflict.

**Communication:** Managers must pay attention to nonverbal cues. When they make statements or say things like “you just don’t understand,” or “your idea will never work,” we put others on the defensive. They feel attacked and strike back, causing conflict to escalate. Take responsibility for your communication—“I’m not sure, I’ve clearly stated my objection,” or “I have a concern about the marketing part of this plan. Can we discuss this?”—and conflicts are less likely to occur.

**Focusing on others first:** When we are in disagreement with others, we only try to explain to them the superiority of our ideas. The use of the term ‘YOU’ gives others a hint that they need to defend themselves. An effective method of preventing conflict includes predicting other’s disagreement or objection and then trying to explain how our proposal can take care of the issue.

<b>Value Addition 10: Activity</b>
<b>Role Play</b>
<p>Constitute 5 teams of 2 members each. Assign one of the situations for role play given below to each team.</p> <p>The Situations are as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Kaveri and Ridhima can’t agree as to who should represent their joint project to a committee for approval;</li><li>2. Aman demands an i-Phone from his father, which he denies;</li><li>3. Ashutosh is harassing his wife Megha psychologically.</li><li>4. Avni and Ravi disagree on having a dress code at work;</li><li>5. The company policy clearly states that accepting gifts from suppliers is not allowed. But, Pranav who happens to be your colleague is happily taking gifts from a supplier.</li></ol> <p>Allow 5-10 minutes to all teams to develop their role play strategy. While each team performs, the other teams and their peers must pay attention to the following for evaluating their performance:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The communication between the players to present the situation effectively;</li><li>2. Demonstration of conflicting interest;</li><li>3. Strategy used to manage conflict;</li><li>4. The consequence if conflict is resolved or it persists.</li></ol> <p>At the end of all 5 role plays, discuss for each team the attitudes leading to/ preventing conflicts between their roles. Summarise your discussion in a table that shows what leads to conflict and how it can be managed or prevented.</p>

### Summary:

- Conflict occurs when there are differences in goals, thoughts or emotions.
- These differences can take place within a person himself and also between groups or two individuals.
- It is advisable and important to deal with conflict in a constructive manner.
- Managers should not be intimidated by conflict. They must face it in an intelligent manner.

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- Conflicts can be encountered and resolved successfully.
- Conflicts may be positive as well as negative.
- Positive conflict is desirable. It strengthens an organization or person's primary objectives.
- Negative conflict is dysfunctional as opposed to positive conflict. It obstructs an organisation and its people's performance.
- Presence of certain conditions is necessary which gives rise to opportunities that give birth to conflict.
- Communication, structure and personal variables are the possible sources of conflict.
- For conflict to happen there has to be a perception which may differ from other people's perception.
- An understanding of the other person's intentions is necessary since it helps to know how one is supposed to respond to the other's behaviour.
- The 5 dimensions of conflict-handling intentions are: Competing, Collaborating, Avoiding, Accommodating and Compromising.
- The conflicting party's reactions, statements and actions are included in the behaviour stage.
- The action-reaction reciprocation between the conflicting parties has certain implications: Functional and Dysfunctional.
- Conflict is healthy, but it would still be wise to wipe off any traces of conflict even before it begins to surface.
- Careful management of conflict can help managers enjoy the advantages of conflict beyond costs.

### Exercises:

#### Short Questions:

1. What do you understand by Conflict?
2. What is positive and negative conflict?
3. Is conflict always bad?
4. Explain the transitions in the views of conflict.
5. What can be the possible sources of conflict?
6. Can conflict be avoided?
7. What can managers do to manage conflict?
8. What is the difference between perceived conflict and felt conflict?
9. Differentiate between traditional, human relations and interactionist views of conflict.

#### Long Questions:

1. What are the implications of positive and negative conflict?
2. Explain the different stages in the process of conflict.
3. Examine the different sources of conflict.
4. What do you understand by perception? How is it related to conflict?
5. How can managers create functional conflict?
6. What are the implications of action-reaction reciprocation between the conflicting parties?
7. Explain the dimensions of conflict-handling intentions.
8. "Intentions obtrude people's emotions and perceptions and also their apparent behaviour." Discuss.
9. Elucidate upon the various conflict prevention techniques.

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## Glossary:

**360 degree feedback:** It is used in human resource management and industrial psychology. It is a feedback taken about an employee from subordinates, superiors, peers and himself.

**Employee Attitude Surveys:** This is survey that helps in knowing what the employees think about the organization. It measures their opinions and perception on different aspects related to workplace.

**Job Design:** It refers to the tasks, responsibilities, performance expectations, work conditions (time and place of work), skills, and methods to be used at the workplace. It is in the form of a written job description.

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- Visit the URL <http://www.dcardillo.com/articles/sevenstrategies.html> to know more on strategies for managing conflict.
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